

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1 1. In a relationship between a fluid supplier and a user, system for
2 distributing fluids, the system comprising:
3 a transportable fluid container containing a fluid;
4 a fluid distribution station in fluid communication with the fluid container, the
5 fluid distribution station being configured to:
6 dispense an amount of fluid from the transportable fluid container;
7 determine the amount of fluid being dispensed from the transportable
8 fluid container; and
9 transmit information about the dispensed fluid; and
10 a computer system in communication with the fluid distribution station, the
11 computer system comprising a processor and instructions executable by the processor to:
12 receive the information about the dispensed fluid; and
13 account for the dispensed fluid.

1 2. A system for distributing fluids as recited in claim 1, wherein
2 determining the amount of fluid being dispensed from the transportable fluid container
3 comprises measuring the amount of fluid being dispensed from the transportable fluid
4 container.

1 3. A system for distributing fluids as recited in claim 1, wherein the
2 computer system is incorporated within the fluid distribution station.

1 4. A system for distributing fluids as recited in claim 1, wherein the
2 computer system is incorporated within a control terminal remote from the fluid distribution
3 station.

1 5. A system for distributing fluids as recited in claim 1, wherein the fluid
2 is a petroleum-based fluid.

1 6. A system for distributing fluids as recited in claim 1, wherein
2 accounting for the dispensed fluid comprises transferring ownership of the dispensed fluid
3 from the fluid supplier.

1 7. A system for distributing fluids as recited in claim 1, wherein
2 accounting for the dispensed fluid comprises transmitting to the fluid supplier information
3 about the dispensed fluid.

1 8. A system for distributing fluids as recited in claim 1, wherein
2 accounting for the dispensed fluid comprises determining an amount of fluid remaining in the
3 fluid container.

1 9. A system for distributing fluids as recited in claim 1, wherein
2 accounting for the dispensed fluid comprises determining whether a machine using the
3 dispensed fluid is operating normally.

4 10. In a relationship between a fluid supplier and a user, a method of
5 distributing an industrial fluid, the method comprising:
6 providing at the user's location a transportable fluid container having
7 contained therein an industrial fluid, wherein the transportable fluid container and the
8 industrial fluid contained therein are owned by the fluid supplier;
9 allowing the user to dispense an amount of industrial fluid from the
10 transportable fluid container;
11 as the amount of industrial fluid is being dispensed from the transportable
12 fluid container, determining the amount of industrial fluid dispensed; and
13 accounting for the industrial fluid dispensed from the transportable container.

1 11. A method of distributing an industrial fluid as recited in claim 10,
2 wherein providing at the user's location a transportable fluid container having contained
3 therein an industrial fluid comprises transporting the transportable container to the user's
4 location while the transportable container has contained therein the industrial fluid.

1 12. A method of distributing an industrial fluid as recited in claim 10,
2 wherein the industrial fluid comprises a petroleum-based fluid.

1 13. A method of distributing an industrial fluid as recited in claim 10,
2 wherein the industrial fluid comprises a lubricant for a vehicle.

1 14. A method of distributing an industrial fluid as recited in claim 10,
2 wherein the industrial fluid comprises a cutting fluid.

1 15. A method of distributing an industrial fluid as recited in claim 10,
2 wherein accounting for the industrial fluid dispensed from the transportable container
3 comprises transferring from the fluid supplier ownership of the industrial fluid dispensed
4 from the transportable container.

1 16. A method of distributing an industrial fluid as recited in claim 10,
2 wherein accounting for the industrial fluid dispensed from the transportable container
3 comprises billing the user for the industrial fluid dispensed from the transportable container.

1 17. A method of distributing an industrial fluid as recited in claim 10,
2 wherein accounting for the industrial fluid dispensed from the transportable container
3 comprises communicating to the fluid supplier information about the industrial fluid
4 dispensed from the transportable container.

1 18. A method of distributing an industrial fluid as recited in claim 10,
2 wherein accounting for the amount of industrial fluid dispensed from the transportable
3 container comprises determining an amount of industrial fluid remaining in the transportable
4 container.

1 19. A method of distributing an industrial fluid as recited in claim 18,
2 wherein accounting for the amount of industrial fluid dispensed from the transportable
3 container further comprises, if the amount of industrial fluid remaining in the container is less
4 than a threshold value, recording an order for additional industrial fluid.

1 20. A method of distributing an industrial fluid as recited in claim 19,
2 wherein recording an order for additional industrial fluid comprises recording an order for an
3 additional transportable container having contained therein the additional industrial fluid.

4 21. In a relationship between a fluid supplier and a user, a method of
5 distributing fluids, the method comprising:

6 providing a fluid distribution station at the user's location, the fluid
7 distribution station being configured to be coupled with at least one fluid container;

8 providing at least one fluid container having disposed therein a fluid for
9 distribution, the fluid being owned by the fluid supplier;

coupling the at least one fluid container with the fluid distribution station, such that the fluid distribution station and the fluid container are in fluid communication; allowing the user to dispense an amount of fluid from the fluid container using the fluid distribution station; as the fluid is being dispensed, determining with the fluid distribution station the amount of fluid dispensed from the fluid container; and communicating to the fluid supplier information about the fluid dispensed from the fluid container.

22. A method of distributing fluids as recited in claim 21, further comprising transferring ownership of the dispensed fluid from the fluid supplier.

23. A method of distributing fluids as recited in claim 21, wherein the at least one fluid container is a plurality of fluid containers, each of the plurality of fluid containers having disposed therein a fluid for distribution, each of the fluids being owned by the fluid supplier.

24. A method of distributing fluids as recited in claim 21, wherein the fluid is a petroleum-based fluid.

25. A method of distributing fluids as recited in claim 21, further comprising determining an amount of fluid remaining in the fluid container based on the amount of fluid dispensed from the fluid container.

26. A method of distributing fluids as recited in claim 25, further comprising communicating to the fluid supplier the amount of fluid remaining in the fluid container.

27. A method of distributing fluids as recited in claim 21, wherein providing a fluid distribution station comprises leasing the fluid distribution station to the user.

28. A method of distributing fluids as recited in claim 21, wherein the fluid distribution station is mobile.

29. A method of distributing fluids as recited in claim 28, wherein the fluid distribution station comprises means for locomotion.

1 30. A method of distributing fluids as recited in claim 21, further
2 comprising providing a control terminal in communication with the fluid distribution station,
3 the control terminal being configured to receive data from the fluid distribution station about
4 the fluid dispensed from the fluid container.

1 31. A method of distributing fluids as recited in claim 30, wherein
2 communicating to the fluid supplier information about the fluid dispensed from the fluid
3 container comprises:
4 transmitting from the fluid distribution station data about the fluid dispensed
5 from the fluid container;
6 receiving at the control terminal the data about the fluid dispensed from the
7 fluid container; and
8 transmitting from the control terminal to the fluid supplier the data about the
9 fluid dispensed from the fluid container.

1 32. A method of distributing fluids as recited in claim 30, further
2 comprising transmitting from the control terminal an authorization to dispense fluid from the
3 fluid container.

1 33. A method of distributing fluids as recited in claim 32, wherein the
2 authorization to dispense fluid from the fluid container specifies an amount of fluid to be
3 dispensed.

1 34. A method of distributing fluids as recited in claim 32, further
2 comprising transmitting from the fluid distribution station a request for an authorization to
3 dispense fluid from the fluid container.

1 35. A method of dispensing an industrial fluid, the method comprising:
2 providing a fluid distribution station, the fluid distribution station being
3 configured to be coupled with at least one fluid container;
4 coupling a transportable fluid container with the fluid distribution station, such
5 that the fluid distribution station and the transportable fluid container are in fluid
6 communication, the transportable fluid container having contained therein an industrial fluid
7 owned by a fluid supplier;

8 dispensing an amount of fluid from the fluid container using the fluid
9 distribution station;
10 as the fluid is being dispensed, determining with the fluid distribution station
11 the amount of fluid dispensed from the fluid container;
12 transmitting to a computer remote from the fluid distribution station
13 information about the fluid dispensed from the fluid container.

1 36. A method of dispensing an industrial fluid as recited in claim 35,
2 further comprising:
3 coupled with a second container with the fluid distribution station; and
4 pressurizing the second container with a gas.

1 37. A method of dispensing an industrial fluid as recited in claim 36,
2 further comprising:
3 dispensing the gas from the second container.

1 38. A method of dispensing an industrial fluid as recited in claim 36,
2 wherein the gas serves as a source of pressure for dispensing the industrial fluid.

1 39. A fluid distribution station configured to dispense at least one fluid, the
2 fluid distribution station comprising:
3 a connecting mechanism for providing fluid communication between the fluid
4 distribution station and at least one transportable fluid container;
5 a fluid displacement mechanism configured to transfer an amount of fluid
6 from the at least one transportable fluid container;
7 a fluid measurement device for measuring the amount of fluid transferred from
8 the at least one transportable fluid container; and
9 a communication system operable to transmit information about the fluid
10 transferred from the at least one transportable fluid container.

1 40. A fluid distribution station as recited in claim 39, wherein the fluid
2 measurement device comprises a scale.

1 41. A fluid distribution station as recited in claim 39, wherein the fluid
2 measurement device comprises an impulse flow meter.

1 42. A fluid distribution station as recited in claim 39, wherein the
2 communication system comprises a radio-frequency antenna.

1 43. A fluid distribution station as recited in claim 39, further comprising a
2 control system, the control system comprising a processor and instructions executable by the
3 processor to receive from the fluid measurement device data about the fluid transferred from
4 the at least one transportable fluid container.

1 44. A fluid distribution station as recited in claim 43, wherein the control
2 system comprises further instructions executable by the processor to transmit to a control
3 terminal via the communication system the data about the fluid transferred from the at least
4 one transportable fluid container.

1 45. A fluid distribution station as recited in claim 43, wherein the control
2 system comprises further instructions executable by the processor to receive from a control
3 terminal an authorization to dispense an amount of fluid from the at least one transportable
4 fluid container.

1 46. A fluid distribution station as recited in claim 39, wherein the fluid
2 displacement mechanism operates using a pressurized gas.

1 47. A fluid distribution station as recited in claim 46, further comprising an
2 attachment mechanism configured to provide fluid communication between an external
3 source of pressurized gas and the at least one fluid container.

1 48. A fluid distribution station as recited in claim 46, wherein the fluid
2 distribution station is configured to be in fluid communication with an additional container
3 having contained therein a supply of pressurized gas, the fluid distribution station being
4 operable to provide fluid communication between the additional container and the at least one
5 transportable fluid container, such that the fluid displacement mechanism operates using the
6 supply of pressurized gas.

1 49. In a relationship between a fluid supplier and a user, a transportable
2 fluid container for delivering an industrial fluid from the fluid supplier to the user, the
3 transportable fluid container being configured to contain therein an industrial fluid that may
4 be dispensed by the user, the transportable fluid container being further configured to be

5 placed in fluid communication with a fluid distribution station, such that the user may
6 dispense a first amount of fluid from the transportable fluid container using the fluid
7 distribution station, whereupon the first amount of fluid dispensed from the transportable
8 fluid container may be measured and accounted for separately from a second amount of fluid
9 remaining in the transportable fluid container, such that ownership of the first amount of fluid
10 dispensed from the transportable fluid container can be transferred from the fluid supplier to
11 the user, while ownership of the second amount of fluid remaining in the transportable fluid
12 container remains with the fluid supplier.

1 50. A transportable fluid container as recited in claim 49, wherein the
2 transportable fluid container is further configured to be transported using a general-purpose
3 freight transport vehicle.

1 51. A transportable fluid container as recited in claim 49, wherein the
2 transportable fluid container comprises a fluid displacement mechanism configured to be
3 coupled to the fluid distribution station, thereby providing fluid communication between the
4 transportable fluid container and the fluid distribution station, such that the fluid
5 displacement mechanism is operable to dispense fluid from the transportable fluid container
6 via the fluid distribution system.

1 52. A transportable fluid container as recited in claim 49, wherein the
2 transportable fluid container is associated with an identifier, the identifier being configured to
3 identify the fluid contained within the container.

1 53. In a relationship between a fluid supplier and a user, a computer
2 software product for facilitating the distribution of industrial fluids, the computer software
3 product being embodied on a computer readable medium and including instructions
4 executable by a computer processor to:

5 receive information about a fluid being dispensed from a fluid distribution
6 station;

7 determine the amount of fluid dispensed from the fluid distribution station;

8 transmit information about the dispensed fluid; and

9 account for the dispensed fluid.

1 54. A computer software product as recited in claim 53, wherein at least
2 part of the computer software product is configured to be executed on a processor
3 incorporated within a fluid distribution station.

1 55. A computer software product as recited in claim 53, wherein at least
2 part of the computer software product is configured to be executed on a processor
3 incorporated within a control terminal.

1 56. A computer software product as recited in claim 55, wherein the
2 control terminal is located at a facility operated by the user,

1 57. A computer software product as recited in claim 53, wherein at least
2 part of the computer software product is configured to be executed on a processor
3 incorporated within a server operated by the fluid supplier.

1 58. A computer software product as recited in claim 53, wherein
2 accounting for the dispensed fluid comprises transferring ownership of the dispensed fluid.